

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Division of Special Education  
July 22, 2004

**Guidelines for Special Education Involvement in the  
Missouri Reading First Initiative**

Several questions have arisen regarding the involvement of special education teachers and staff within the framework of the Reading First grant program. Below are some “givens” that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Division of Special Education will use to drive special education involvement in Missouri Reading First as well as some issues that have been discussed at recent trainings with responses.

- The Division of Special Education is committed to the Reading First initiative in Missouri because staff believes it will improve the reading achievement of **all** children. One of the Division’s performance goals, “The percentage of students with disabilities in Grade 3 and 7 who are proficient readers will increase,” should be positively affected by the combined team efforts in Reading First. In an effort to support this partnership, it is the Division’s intent to provide maximum flexibility in operational and funding guidelines for Reading First schools while still adhering to federal and state special education regulations implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Reading First is considered general education. Reading First is not to be considered as special instruction for purposes of special education, therefore Reading First time cannot be counted as minutes toward specialized reading instruction. If specialized reading instruction is deemed appropriate by the individualized education program (IEP) team, it must be provided for in the IEP, and the amount of time listed in the IEP must be provided in addition to the child’s Reading First time.
- Reading First co-teaching could possibly cause some concerns for teacher caseloads. If needed, an alternative caseload calculation for special education teachers participating in a Reading First co-teaching model can be submitted to the Division of Special Education as outlined in the State Plan for Special Education.
- The IEP will always take precedence over Reading First grant guidelines. As each student is a unique individual and IEPs are developed to address their varying needs, we would not necessarily expect every student to benefit from the Reading First approach. However, as Reading First is a research-based reading program with many prospective benefits for students with special needs, it is probable that revisions in the amount of specialized instruction in reading provided for in the child’s current IEP may need to be considered. Reading First grants were not awarded until after most IEP team meetings were held in the spring of 2004. Therefore, it may be appropriate for the IEP team of many K-3 students with an IEP for specialized instruction in reading, to reconvene and discuss whether the Reading First option may be more beneficial to the child than the current placement and amount of reading instruction provided for through the IEP.

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***Q: Can special education teachers co-teach or work in classrooms without identified IEP students?***

**A:** No. There must be at least one identified IEP student in the classroom in which they are co-teaching.

***Q: In what ways can special education teachers work with Reading First?***

**A:** Special education teachers may provide instruction and screening in the classroom or other location in the school, in whole group or small group settings. This is permissible, and is referenced in the “incidental benefit” clause of the federal regulations implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (34 CFR Sec. 300.235), as long as there is one identified IEP student in the classroom or the group. A special education teacher will be allowed up to 90 minutes (possibly up to 180 with DESE approval) of Reading First co-teaching time daily. This time may be scheduled anytime during the day, as long as some of that time is during the 90 minute Reading First block. Co-teaching time may also be split between grade level Reading First blocks based on best service to the needs of all students.

***Q: Does the special education student in the classroom referenced above have to have “CWC Instruction” listed on the IEP?***

**A:** No. Remember that Reading First is considered to be regular education reading instruction, so instruction during this time would not be “specialized instruction” for the student and thus, should not be listed on the IEP.

The Division’s staff realizes that the first year of Reading First in school districts will be a developmental year. As situations arise about which you have questions, do not hesitate to call us. We will be collecting information and data as the year progresses so that more precise guidelines can be formulated. We would encourage you to bring to our attention any policy barriers that hinder our efforts in co-teaching, teaming, and collaboration.

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